

# The Middletown Transcript.

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## Farmer Stebbins as Santa Claus.

By WILL CARLETON.

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We went to Peggstown visiting, my good old wife and me, An' thought that we would bathe ourselves in Christmas joy an' glee; For Sarah Ann, a buxom dame, an' daughter, too, of mine, Resides there with her older half an' children eight or nine; An' so we gathered gifts enough to make 'em all content An' took the train an' landed there the very day we went.



The children warmly greeted us an' crowded round my chair, With four a-perchin' on my knees an' young uns still to spare; An' asked about my spectacles, an' how I grewed my wig, An' if my papa bought my teeth before I got so big, An' how my whiskers come to bleach an' other questions prone To make a mortal realize that younger days have flown;

An' if I ever looked it up how far I was around, An' when I run if it would shake the whole ad-jacent ground, An' if the your-correct-weight box didn't think I was a lot, An' if I wouldn't have to put two pennies in the slot, With other questions well designed to give a hint to me That I was not a first class sylph so far as they could see.

An' when I told 'em fairy tales they wouldn't believe a word, An' said the Sin' bad sailor things could never have occurred; An' all the pleasant little lies that used to cheer my youth They set upon without delay as destitute of truth, An' when of Christmas mysteries in solemn tones I spoke, They laughed an' said that Santa Claus was all 'a bloomin' fake."



So Christmas eve I slyly told my daughter

Sarah Ann: "I'll show the tots a little sight to laugh at if they can. Yo' rake the fireplace clear o' fire, not tellin' them the cause, An' I'll come down the chimney way dressed up as Santa Claus. It isn't very far to climb—the weather's pretty mild, An' I would do three times as much to interest a child."



I went an' clad in hairy garb, with whiskers long an' white, An' other things to paralyze the inexperienced sight, An' had some sleighbells bright an' new a-hangin' on my arms, An' pockets full o' Christmas things to add unto my charms, An' with the strongest ladder rope that I could find in town I entered in the chimney top an' clambered slowly down.

My goodness sakes! Who ever heard of such un-timely luck! The chimney narrowed all at once, an' suddenly I stuck An' hung there like a roostin' hen a-waitin' to be brown, For spite of all my effort I couldn't get up or down. An' then the chill'n heard the noise an' run distressin' fleet An' looked an' yelled: "It's Gran'pa Steb. We know him by his feet!"

An' then their mother had to tell what I had tried to do, Whereat their little fancies sprung the subject to pursue. They asked me if I'd traveled far, if chimneys injured coats, An' where my span of reindeers was, an' if they'd like some oats, An' told me, with a childish greed for Christmas gathered pelf, If I would throw the presents down, I needn't come myself;



An' there I hung for quite awhile, with fury in my heart, Until they brought a mason in, who took the bricks apart; An' though they made the children stop, an' sent 'em off to bed, I knowed what they was thinkin' of an' what they prob'ly said, An' when the mornin' did appear an' breakfast time occurred, They set around the table there forbid to say a word;



A-sufferin' so to laugh, at me, afraid that I'd be gruff, An' longin' for their presents, too—I knowed it well enough, An' then a tear come in my eye, an' like a fond old dunce I went an' dug the presents out an' give 'em all to once. An' then I says, "If Santa Claus is what you call 'a fake, These 'ere pritty things he brought fur you is real an' no mistake."

An' then they up an' danced around an' kissed me, one by one, An' hugged me harder than the blamed old chimney just had done, An' with a thousand looks of love incumbered me with thanks An' made me like 'em more an' more in spite of all their pranks. An' the prettiest of the whole, who always took my part, "She smiles an' says: "It's Gran'pa Steb. We know him by his heart!"

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## AN EPISODE.

CHRISTMAS OF THE JOLLY THEATER STOCK COMPANY.

(Copyright, 1895, by James L. Ford.)

Three weeks before the holidays, and the outlook for a merry Christmas was a gloomy one, at least so far as the members of the stock company of the Jolly Theater were concerned. Salary day had come and gone, and as yet the ghost had shown no disposition to walk, and it was because of the nonappearance of that most welcome specter of stage-land that the rumor had started and was rapidly gaining ground that Messrs. Hustle and Hardup, proprietors and managers of the Jolly Theater, were "in a hole again."

The piece which occupied the boards had proved a flat failure, and receipts at the box office had fallen in consequence to a plane never before reached in the history of the house. Moreover, no new play had as yet been put in rehearsal, and an atmosphere of unmistakable gloom and apprehension pervaded the region behind the footlights and weighed heavily on the spirits of every one there, from Pearl Livingstone, the talented emotional actress who played the leading female part, down to little Kitty Sullivan, who was only 7 years old and was in the depths of despair because for fully three weeks she had been out of the bill. In short, every member of the company was in a condition of mingled uncertainty and curiosity in regard to the future of the playhouse and the prospects of its managers, who as yet had given no sign of their intentions and had, in fact, been invisible to the members of their artistic staff ever since the last day on which salaries became due.

On this particular night, which happened to be one of storm and rain, two or three of the principal actors had gathered together for a serious talk about the situation, when Tom, the programme boy, appeared suddenly before them in an almost breathless condition and exclaimed: "Mr. Freeland is back from Chicago. He's in the office with Mr. Hustle. They've got both doors locked."

"Mr. Freeland!" cried Miss Livingstone, her face lighting up with joy, precisely as it does in her scene in the second act where her lover comes back from India, or rather as it did light up in that scene before the business became so bad. "Are you sure it was Mr. Freeland, Tommy?"

"Sure!" rejoined Tom, with emphasis. "I scou him myself when he come in. 'Then, Tom, you be sure and see him when he comes out and tell him that I am particularly anxious to see him back here as soon as the curtain goes down on the second act. Here's a quarter for you, Tom, and you'd better keep it as a curiosity, for it's getting to be a very rare sort of bird in the Jolly Theater preserves.'"

"Thank you, mum," said Tom as he pocketed the coin, with a grin. "I fancy I see a gleam of light on the distant horizon," remarked the venerable Mr. Borders in a tone similar to that which he assumes in the great melodrama called "The Ocean Blue," in the scene in which he is discovered sitting on a raft in midocean, on the lookout for a passing sail. "In the meantime," he added, "I think we had better wait and hear what Billy has to say before we take any further action in the matter."

Up to that moment they had taken no action whatever, but the phrase sounded well, and so Mr. Borders employed it.

Now, Mr. William Freeland, called by his intimates Billy, was and is today one of the best known figures in the theatrical affairs of the town, and as every member of the stock company knew, he had on more than one previous occasion come to the rescue of his old friends, Messrs. Hustle and Hardup, and that, too, when they were in even more deplorable financial straits than they were at the present moment.

It was his reputation as a mascot fully as much as his remarkable talents which caused the whole vast scene to brighten up at the news of his presence in the theater, for playfolk are notoriously superstitious and have an unbounded and childlike faith in the efficacy of a mascot as well as in the destructive qualities of a "jough."

Just as the curtain fell on the second act Mr. Freeland appeared behind the scenes and received the rapturous greetings of the company. Then Miss Livingstone took him by the arm, detached him from the little group which surrounded him, led him gently but firmly into her dressing room, placed him on his zinc trunk, and standing before him



"MR. FREELAND IS BACK."

pieces and the bottom would drop out of the whole play. I thought I'd speak to you about it because Hardup has caught a new 'angel' and said something to me about Kitty Bracebridge!" "If that wolf puts her foot in this theater!" began Miss Livingstone, but Mr. Freeland interrupted her by placing his hand over her mouth and saying: "Wait for me after the curtain goes down, Pearl, and I'll talk to you about it. Shadrach's waiting in the office, and I've got to give him a 'jolly' so as to get the costumes out of him, but I'll be back here after the last act."

In spite of the storm outside and the dispiriting atmosphere within the performance given that night by the Jolly stock company was a notably brilliant one, for the news had spread that there was to be a speedy change of bill, and hope was once more in every member's breast. Mr. Freeland invited Miss Livingstone out to supper just as she was on the point of declaring that she would not go on again unless she received every cent of the back salary that was due her, and before they left the restaurant she had made a deal to study the great emotional role which had been intended for Miss Bracebridge and to say nothing more about back salary.

The next morning, in accordance with a call posted in the stage entrance, the company assembled to hear the new play read by the gifted Mr. Freeland, and such was that gentleman's elocutionary power that when he laid the manuscript aside expressions that ranged from mere satisfaction to rapturous enthusiasm were heard on every hand, and there was scarcely an actor or actress present that did not feel confident of a personal success in the new production.

The reading over, Mr. Freeland took Miss Livingstone, Mr. Borders and one or two others to the back of the house, as he expressed it in a subsequent interview with Mr. Hustle, "stiffened their backbones" with the assurance that everything was all right and that the piece was to be done on Christmas eve in order that they might have a really merry Christmas on the prospects of its success. After that, he assured them, their back salaries would pour in upon them in a perfect avalanche.

As Mr. Freeland was leaving the theater he felt some one tugging at his coat, and on looking down saw little Kitty Sullivan standing beside him and saying, in earnest tones, and with a sad, wistful face, "Billy, isn't there any part for me in the new piece?"

The child called him by his first name because she had always heard him spoken to in that way by other members of the company, and Billy rather encouraged her in the idea because it sounded funny to him to hear himself addressed in such familiar terms by an infant of her size.

Kitty was a veritable child of an avuncular age, and had been an actress from her very earliest infancy. She was now about 7 years of age, and was just beginning to comprehend the difference between the real things of life, such as houses, trees and streets, and the painted imitations of stageland. And yet it was only two years and a half ago that she beheld the ocean for the first time, and it is related of her that on that occasion she stood with Billy's hand tightly clasped in hers, watching the waves as they broke upon the beach, and finally turned to her companion and said in her serious way, "Billy, how do they work 'em?"

And now she was here beside her old friend, with her small, pathetic face turned, and inquiring earnestly if there were a role for her in "The Giant's Causeway."

"See here, Kitty," exclaimed Mr. Freeland, touched by the child's grief, "I'll tell you what I'll do for you, and what's more, I wouldn't do it for any one else in the company. Are you listening?"

"Yes," said Kitty, turning her head around.

"Well, I'll write in a part specially for you, and that's something that an author like Sardon or myself rarely does for any one except a Barnhardt or a Duse. Now, run along and be here to-morrow at 11 for rehearsal."

The child darted away, wiping the last tear from her cheek as she ran, and Billy said approvingly, "That's the best deed you'll ever do in your life, Mr. Freeland, and, mark my words, the child'll bring good luck to the house."

Giant's Causeway" were carried forward under Mr. Freeland's direction with the energy and spirit that mark all of that gentleman's undertakings.

The opening night, Dec. 24, found the house well filled with an audience which made a favorable impression on the venerable Mr. Borders as he looked out through the peephole in the curtain, while behind the footlights feverish excitement and anticipation prevailed.

As for Kitty, she had become so wrought up over her role—the longest one she had ever been entrusted with—that she seemed in danger of losing her balance and forgetting every one of the lines that she had, by diligent study, crammed into her small head. She was standing in the first entrance, with her hand clasped in that of Mr. Freeland, when her cue came, and as she walked out on the stage, the ideal of childish loveliness, a murmur of delight ran through every part of the crowded house.

"They're going to foreclose the mortgage on the old mill tomorrow night, and if that child lives I am a beggar," said the polished, cigarette smoking villain, and then a youngster in the parquet set up a pitiful howl of despair, which was followed by a general ripple of merriment that might have proved fatal to the piece had not Kitty gone on with her lines with the coolness and gravity of the born and experienced artist, which she was displaying there by a presence of mind which won for her, on her exit, the first real applause of the evening.

Kitty Sullivan was, as the eminent dramatic critic had observed, an old hand at the business, despite the fact that she was but 7 years of age, for she had been born and brought up on the stage and was as much at home in the presence of a great audience as an ordinary child is before a nursery. As the piece went on she realized that she was making a hit—a far greater one than she had ever made before—and, young

a magnetic current with which the atmosphere was charged, and might have



KITTY MAKES A HIT.

been heard to remark half audibly, "The kid's knocked 'em good this time, sure, for a thing's got to be good if it suits me."

And as the audience dispersed that night it seemed to Mr. Freeland, as he stood alert and watchful in the lobby, that there was but one name on every tongue, and that Kitty's sweet face and infantile art had made their way into the very heart of an always fickle public. "You were right about her, Billy," said Hardup.

"I told you the young one would bring us good luck," said old Barney at the stage door.

"The idea of making such a fuss over a 7-year-old brat! That shows what art is coming to in this country!" exclaimed Miss Livingstone as she swept through the drafty passage, leaving an odor of sealskin, tuberoses and sachet powder behind her.

The members of the stock company had their Christmas dinner in the wardrobe room between the matinee and the evening performance, Messrs. Hustle and Hardup footing the bill and Mr. Freeland presiding, with Miss Pearl Livingstone on his right hand and the venerable Mr. Borders on his left. And it is a matter of record that no toast-offered that evening was drunk with heartier applause than was the one proposed by Mr. Freeland to Kitty Sullivan, "the mascot of the Jolly Theater and the founder of this feast."

JAMES L. FORD.



HE FELT SOME ONE TUGGING AT HIS COAT.

As she was, she was enough of an artist to appreciate the importance of keeping a restraint on herself and not overdoing her role.

She was looking forward to a certain scene in the last act—a scene which she had rehearsed with much delight, and in which she firmly expected to make a great impression. Billy, who had been waiting with some anxiety for the same scene, came down and took a seat in a proscenium box, and as the child stood in the wings waiting for her cue she saw him smiling encouragement to her. The scene represented a barren, wave

washed rock near the coast of Ireland, and on this rock was standing the virtuous heroine, just where she had been left by the villain. The lights grew dim, the moon arose from beyond the scene, and the Philadelphia quartet, stationed behind the scenes, warbled plaintive Irish melodies.

"Must I die here alone!" moaned the heroine as the tide rose higher and higher about the rock on which she stood and heavy clouds began to gather about her head. And just at this moment, a rowboat, propelled by childish arms, came swiftly around the rocky point at the left of the stage, and Kitty Sullivan, throwing aside the oars, stood up in the boat with her foot on the prow and exclaimed in a clear, infantile treble, "I have come to save you for the sake of old Ireland!"

Commonplace as it was, with its old, well worn melodramatic effects of soft music and moonlight, nevertheless the situation had taken a strong hold on the audience, and the sudden appearance of the sweet faced child, who had charmed every one during the earlier portions of the play, sent a distinct thrill through the entire house, and then came such an outburst of spontaneous applause as had not been heard in the Jolly Theater for many a year.

Even Billy Freeland felt a touch of

Tom to Sue and Sue to Tom. "Can you guess, my sweetheart," queried Tom of Sue, "Can youathom by love's art what I'll buy for you?" Pretty Susan bowed her head, made a pretty guess, and then in accents sweet she said, opening eyes of brown: "Why, certainly not. But I'm dying to have Christmas eve come so that I can find out. I know it will be something frightfully expensive—something that will cost lots more than you can afford. You men are so reckless with your money!" Poor Tom next day ran in debt for a diamond pin.

And he hasn't paid up yet, for he's "shy of town."

He says that if he ever asks Sue such a question again it will be after he has arranged in advance for a year's board in the nearest insane asylum. By the way, Sue gave Tom a piece of neckwear that cost 75 cents.

The Yankee Girl. "How brilliant and mirthful the light of her eye. Like a star glancing out from the blue of the sky. And lightly and freely her dark tresses play O'er a brow and a bosom as lovely as they." The Yankee girl is not always blest with abundant health. There are unfortunately hundreds of Yankee girls and matrons who are dragging out an existence. They suffer from ailments peculiar to their sex. Life is a burden. Where can they obtain relief? The question is hard to answer. Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription will bring the brilliant and mirthful light back to their eyes and the blush of health to their cheeks. It cures all irregularities, weaknesses, nervous and general debility, spasms, St. Vitus's Dance, and kindred ailments.

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